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Chesapeake Bay Buyboats • Americans and Eels



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On the Cover

Photographer Constance Stuart Larrabee's own waterfront farm and the homes of friends and neighbors provided the setting for much of her later work. She often showed a taste for the rustic, as with this homebuilt skiff. There are more than 1,000 Larrabee photographs in the CBMM collection.

President's Message

Our exhibits, public programs, and publications are designed and written to engage a wide audience. The experience of one visitor or reader may differ from that of another, but the goal is to create a meaningful experience for each.

Author Larry Chowning makes the Bay's history accessible and interesting. He does this by listening to those who experienced the unfolding of the Bay's story first-hand, and often allowing them to tell it in their own words. Chowning's books *Harvesting the Chesapeake* and *Chesapeake Legacy*

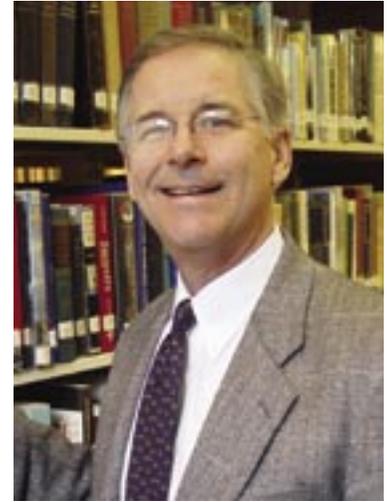
are an invaluable record of the fast-fading tools and traditions of the Bay. His rapport with watermen, his ear for their language, and his understanding of their customs helped Chowning translate valuable oral histories into highly readable cultural documentaries.

Chowning's book *Chesapeake Bay Buyboats* is newly released from Tidewater Publishers and is featured in this issue of the Quarterly. Buyboats remain a special symbol of a disappearing seafood harvesting industry. Named for the purpose they served—buying a catch directly from a waterman still working the water and then transporting the catch to market—buyboats were an integral part of a thriving business. Today, few buyboats are afloat; fewer are still working. Those remaining are mostly cruising vessels. One of the Museum's most versatile vessels is *Mister Jim*, a replica buyboat popular with festival goers.

Chowning spent countless hours interviewing watermen, boat builders, and their relatives and based much of the book on these oral histories. With respect to history, our culture is at a critical juncture. Our way of life on the Bay is changing quickly. We may be looking at the last generations to make a living dredging for oysters, or working in seafood packinghouses, or building wooden or log-built boats.

This makes interviewing these people and collecting their oral histories vitally important to document this stage of our culture. It's this past that is not yet widely written about in books, but new enough to make the daily news.

This time of oral histories and rapid change to the Bay holds a story that needs to be told. Larry Chowning is telling it well with his books. We are telling it with our exhibits, with our Chesapeake People program, with our educational programs, and with our magazine.



John R. Valliant
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CBMM exhibits technician Eric Applegarth readies the ornamental eagle for its perch atop Eagle House.

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Larrabee's

Photos by Constance Stuart Larrabee



Larrabee started to shoot more photographs in 1979 after thirty years of relatively little camera work. She experimented with using the Bay Bridge for a strong diagonal background in this 1981 portrait of an Islander 44.



Photographer Constance Stuart Larrabee spent a few summers in the early 1950s exploring the waters around her new home on the Chesapeake. During these and subsequent cruises, she used her Rolleiflex camera to record a variety of boating activities.

By this time, Larrabee was already recognized for her documentary work during World War II with the South African Army, and after the war in rural South Africa. Born in England and raised in South Africa, Larrabee studied photography in Munich and started in the photography business with a portrait studio in Pretoria. A few years after she immigrated to the United States and married Sterling Larrabee in 1949, she stopped taking photographs professionally.¹ Her camera came out only occasionally, and then around friends or on the Larrabee's farm, "King's Prevention," on the Chester River.

Playing with light and form became the object when Larrabee took her camera up close to her subject. She found this dinghy at the Oxford Boatyard in 1951.



Lens on the Bay

Larrabee liked to photograph people, and she got close enough to this Moth and Penguin heading out from the mouth of the Corsica River in this 1951 regatta.



Consequently, her body of work taken after her move to the Chesapeake is remarkably small—perhaps less than 2,000 photographs. It covers both recreational and commercial activities on the water. Larrabee was interested in taking “strong” photographs—images with high contrast and dramatic composition. However, she rarely bothered to document her images, aside from noting the year she shot them. Names and identifications were unimportant to her art. The Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum has mounted several exhibits of her work, most recently in 1998 with a show on images from Tangier Island. The images on these pages, however, focus on recreational boating—from yards to sailing regattas, and from indigenous log canoes to fiberglass cruisers.

Sources

¹ Roy Hoopes, “Focus on Life,” *Modern Maturity* 34:1 (February-March 1991), 44, 92.

Larrabee was present to witness the double-dismasting of the racing log canoe Noddy on the Miles River in the early 1950s.

This dramatic shot of a solitary Star boat silhouetted against the late afternoon sun reflecting off the water is one of Larrabee’s most recognized Chesapeake photographs. The boat is Star number 3003, Wind Song.

